



COMMUNITY COMMENTS

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THE
COMMUNITY
IN
ECONOMIC
PIONEERING

COMMUNITY SERVICE, INC. Box 243 Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387

PIONEERING THE NEW SOCIETY IN THE GHETTO

The Akron Ohio Ghetto area does not look much different from similar areas in other American cities. It is an old residential and commercial area from which white business and most white people have moved out, leaving shabby run down, sometimes boarded up buildings, the crowded poor, much unemployment, and much crime. It is here that I found one of the most exciting community endeavors I have seen. As Dale Miller guided me around the centers of the project in which he has shared, called by the acronym from its name "Food in Ghetto Houses and Tenements", I saw both the miracle and the human tragedy from which the miracle was growing.

What Dale showed me happening in the Akron ghetto was so different from what I knew of elsewhere, yet so logical, and possible of reproduction that I felt people ought to know of it. So when Dale came to a Community Service conference I asked him to tell the story of Operation FIGHT. The following account includes both his talk at the 1971 conference and an interview he gave after our Alternative Schools conference in the spring of 1973, which fills out some of the story.

Operation FIGHT demonstrates in practice one of the fundamental aspects of our philosophy at Community Service, that the opportunities for significant progress and achievement are far more dependent on our own vision, character and capacity to live and work together than they are on outward circumstances.

One other example of this principle added to Dale Miller's account may help to make this point. At the beginning of the industrial revolution in England a boy of twelve walked to London and got a job there in a shop. By the time he was nineteen he had become manager of the largest textile mill in the world located in Rochdale, near Manchester. He also became associated with creative minds in the area and was actively thinking about social, economic and educational problems. He came up with ideas of organizing consumer cooperatives, of pioneering in education, working and housing conditions for workers, organization of labor unions into a confederation, organization of a labor party for England, and of a society organized in the interest of all people as contrasted with being dominated by the interests of an owning class which he called "socialism".

This man was Robert Owen. Almost every project and initiative Robert Owen undertook eventually succeeded in the hands of other people. Thus the workers in the milltown where Owen had his first mill were the people who developed the idea of the Rochdale form of cooperative organization that became the pattern for world-wide use.

Owen's great accomplishment was to put into the hands of others ideas they could experiment with, adapt and develop into usefulness. Owen's own great competence in practical affairs could best serve by giving to others keys to their own locks by which to open the doors to progress.

We often fail to see what is right at hand that we might do to build a better life for ourselves and mankind. Dale Miller and his associates in a most unlikely circumstance have taken the first steps toward pioneering the development of the new society, and then kept faith with its promise. Dale's story is, I believe, representative of potentialities all of us face in our lives in one form or another.

From a leaflet distributed by Operation FIGHT describing its services:

Operation FIGHT (Food in Ghetto Homes and Tenements) is a community services organization that works to alleviate problems and to upgrade the quality of urban living. We offer direct help to people who have crises in their lives in the areas of food emergency, housing problems, legal problems, etc. We work cooperatively with many other groups and agencies and also rely on the gift of time of dedicated volunteers. We have initiated and sponsored the following programs to answer unmet needs:

- **** The Berth, coffeehouse and cultural center
- **** The Akron Free School, in its 3rd year of free or Summerhillian educational choice, receiving statewide and national notice as a model for educational change.
- **** "Fix-It", offering home repair without cost to poverty families, in cooperation with STRIDE.
- **** Creating equal opportunity for minorities, for example, just having achieved bonding and ground breaking for Ohio's first Black General Contractor and Akron's first Black Excavating Contractor
- **** Advising and helping persons and groups file complaints of Civil Rights discrimination.
- **** Initiating and effectuating the first Personal Recognizance Bond program in Summit County and providing education and counseling regarding Personal Recognizance Bonding.

YOU CAN HELP! We need volunteers, donations of food, clothing, and household goods. Please call 376-3448 or 253-9282

Operation FIGHT
Room #205
380 E. Exchange Street
Akron, Ohio 44304

EXCERPTS FROM DALE MILLER'S TALK

One of the things that we've developed in Akron is a sort of service exchange. For instance, if someone in the community needs a plumber and he hasn't the funds to hire a plumber, we have a plumber we can send over to do the work free. Maybe the plumber has some carpentry work and can't pay for it. Then there will be an exchange of services. So far we have been able to service about a thousand families. Everybody involved exchanges services rather than getting involved in the finances of it. They have managed to do pretty well so far.

We try to inspire this procedure by setting up little headquarters in storefront swap shops where people can exchange things they have for what they want. We do the same thing with our housing. We have a free food headquarters where a guy can get room and board for a dollar a day. This doesn't pay the people that maintain it. They have to go elsewhere for their own survival but this facility is available for those who are in dire need. If they can't pay the dollar a day, we don't worry; we just keep him. This is what it costs us basically. It is pretty easy to keep those who can't pay. We can feed about a hundred people on \$35 dollars. We have to drive to the farmers market where food is inexpensive. We put a 6% markup on it to pay the guys who handle the food, drive the truck and make the delivery. It just covers it. There is nothing for anybody to get fat on. There is really no profit and you have to learn to live on very little in order to be sustained by this type of operation. As long as we can motivate the people in the community, it is not as difficult as it might seem because the needs are very small. We get hung up a lot on the luxuries that are not there. We don't have a color TV set or maybe somebody doesn't have an automobile. We've got just three cars and they all run pretty well because we have a pretty good mechanic. If you have to have transportation, to go shopping and so on, you can call down and they will pick you up. They don't get paid for it and the people don't have to buy an automobile in order to have adequate transportation. It's a much better system.

The way we got started was we thought that we could open a restaurant and have the finest "soul food" restaurant in the city. Everybody would make money and it would solve all our problems. The two we began with were a partner of mine and his wife.

After a couple of months we found that we didn't know enough about the restaurant business to stay alive, so we decided to close it up and just walk away from it. Rather than stay there until we had sold out the remaining food, we decided to give it away. It was wintertime and the school children were going back and forth to school from a pocket of 1700 families in an eight block housing development. So we decided to give the food to the children in

the morning on the way to school. By the next morning we found them there and they had doubled in number. We didn't have enough to feed these people so we said, "Well, we'll have to do something. Come back at lunch time and we'll have something." Well, most big supermarkets instead of giving to charitable organizations will give a certificate for \$5 worth of merchandise in their store. So we covered twenty or thirty different supermarkets in the city and using these certificates, by lunch we had stew, chili, and crackers. We went to the unclaimed freight depot and got things that had been damaged.

It was such a good feeling that we couldn't stop. So we said, "We'll need some help in order for this to develop into something. Let's keep it going." We didn't know what we were going to do or what it was going to develop into. And we had no idea of what the community spirit would do. We had wanted to get rid of what we had so we could close up and get out of there and go somewhere to try and make a living. But they wouldn't let us out!

We were right across the street from some beer taverns; nearby was Alcoholics Anonymous. Some of the adults couldn't understand how we could feed the children. They came in and they were hungry. So we fed them, too. Then we thought, "Wait a minute. Sometime this has got to stop." We would have to provide some method by which we could keep going and not get bogged down in just giving. Giving is a very wonderful thing, but we found it is difficult to give food unless the person who is getting it can feel free to accept it without being hurt and feeling under obligation. The pride factor that developed as a result of the way we were doing it turned people off rather than turning them on. They said, "We don't want to be given something. Why don't you put us to work?" We said we were trying to get out of business. Someone said, "I'll tell you what, we'll paint." So they started to paint the place. And the women in the neighborhood said they could do baby-sitting; mothers said they could do something if they were freed to do it. So we started to ask the wives of the men to come and babysit the kids. The people continued to come and to offer things they could do so they would not be obligated for the things they received.

To get enough food we contacted such firms as the Quaker Oats Company, a coffee firm, and so on for low cost bulk foods, and we'd pass the food out in the evening in order for it not to interfere with the restaurant in the daytime. Now we were working day and night. We were growing but we had no direction. We didn't know what we were doing and hadn't named ourselves. Then the snow came. We were in the bottom of a valley and cars got stuck in the snow. So we fed the people who were stuck. We helped the people who were stuck, even the police cars and impressed on them that we were good guys. A few of the policemen saw this was a good thing and offered their help. We answered, "Help with what? We don't even know what we are doing! We are two guys trying to get out of here!"

And it remained this way for three or four months. Finally somebody said, "You are not going to get out. You are going to have to do something, so why not identify yourself. So we came up with the name "Food in Ghetto Houses and Tenements". Once we had been named the politicians said, "Now you have a name. We know who you are and can give you some money." Well, we went in and found we had no structure, bookkeeping and records. The needs we were serving had not been served in the wealthy city. We had to move ahead in our own way. We opened a clothing factory, got on television, made a brochure, and a community project magazine. Suddenly people thought we were part of the Black Panther Party. I managed to become spokesman for some of the minority labor groups in the area. We began to work with the school dropouts and started with Ellen Margolis in a free school. And we had enough numbers to make an impression on the authorities to help the free school to continue. We began to have political influence and power because of our numbers.

There are so many things that are happening that we cannot cover them now. There is community and collective involvement in all of the problems. In the wealthy city the well-to-do won't admit the presence of poverty and need. When we start to talk about these problems well-to-do people react, thinking we are rabble rousers.

Now we have contacted others outside of Akron in other areas and cities who are facing similar problems and doing similar things. We learn from each other and also bring pressure to bear on governmental organizations that makes them more aware of what we are trying to do.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Gris: Dale, I want to know how you manged to keep FIGHT going and keep it supported.

Dale: Well, you know we've had our problems about financing and getting things done but in the beginning the same as now, we've had that service exchange wherein if we can provide a certain service for an individual then they in turn have to provide some kind of service for us in an area that we need it.

Gris: So, the service exchange is rather fundamental to everything?

Dale: Yes.

Gris: And that service exchange got started after your restaurant failed?

Dale: That's right. We've never changed the thrust of how we get people together who have different skills and exchange them. Not once have we deviated from that. For instance, we have a secretary here, she's been there for two years now; she's never been paid, but we can support her because we are providing low income housing. Now, in providing low income housing we are able to rent a home that we have fixed up for a tenant and have a room to spare for this person who can't afford rent, and maybe take five dollars out of the rent and give to the girl in the office if she has some specific need. For instance, if she needs a tooth pulled and we don't want to wait on the Beacon Journal Foundation to screen her and go through the application, we create a circumstance where she can get her tooth pulled. Or a pair of shoes or whatever. We generate these circumstances by our relationship in a thorough on-going knowledge of the resources of the city and the people that we come in contact with.

Gris: You use resources that can fit in with your economy?

Dale: That's right. We act as a referral wheel. An example of that is in Operation Fix-It where we have homes for senior citizens or people with inadequate incomes. We have no funding for this. The Department of Labor will pay for work experience for young people to do it. So we provide supervision, job sites, and the Department of Labor supplies us with young people to do the job and the combination of these gets the job done.

Gris: And you are not a governmental agency?

Dale: Nope! We are not associated with any area of the government to any degree but we do call on that government for response in certain areas. If we have a project that we want to engage in, well, we will call whatever government department whether it is local, state, or federal government that's nearest and has the most input

or resources that would help us and we make this request out of our service to the community. Recognized service, that's why we document what it is we're doing and send copies of it to the state and copies of it to the city council and copies of it to our congressman so that we are known at all levels for engaging in this kind of service through the community.

Gris: You are not shy. You use publicity?

Dale: Oh, very definitely! They know what we are doing. We put in a request that we need aid of certain kinds, for instance, our typewriters. We couldn't afford the kind of typewriters we have. We borrow the electric typewriters from Model Cities. Now, we borrow them and along with them comes the maintenance and the tapes and they get a chance to write it off as an in-kind service. We use these typewriters to turn out material that is beneficial to the model neighborhood citizens.

Gris: And when the OEO and Model Cities funding from the Federal government stops, your work is not going to suddenly collapse as do so many of these governmental agencies.

Dale: Not going to affect us at all! When they started to talk about the withdrawal of OEO funds, it had no effect on us whatsoever other than to attract those who were employed by these agencies. We said, "Well, we've got work for you. Just come on in and we'll get together and out of this we will use whatever resources we can garner from the other area of the city to support you. You won't have to necessarily go on welfare but if you do have to go on welfare, we will be supportive of welfare's efforts to take care of you and your family." And we've gotten a good response out of it from a cross section that you wouldn't believe.

Gris: Present here are four people from Akron. Are you all in this category of people who are participating?

Dale: Well, Linda Murphy is studying to be a secretary. Generally, she is working at social work in several different areas. She's on call. She does some typing and bookkeeping if necessary or she will go to the courts and handle interviews for personal recognition bonding of people sentenced to jail or bring back information that would assist whatever legal forces we can get together that will represent a person who is having this particular kind of problem. Out of this questioning she develops some understanding of this person, the circumstances surrounding his being in jail, and documents information sufficiently for a judge to read it. Out of it she determines whether or not this person can sign his own way out with the community responsible, or whether they would have to leave him there until he met some financial bonding requirements.

Gris: Linda, did you have a rich uncle who enabled you to do this when there's no money in it?

Linda: No, not at all!

Gris: Then what happened? How in the world did you get in touch with this?

Linda: I met Dale and he got me involved in this.

Gris: How did you meet Dale?

Linda: Through a friend. And so he got me involved with Dale and Dale got me involved with working with Operation FIGHT and I've enjoyed it. Like Dale has already said they supply me with my needs. If I don't have a place to stay, they provide me with housing and food and whatever. And so in return for me doing this work they can help me where I need it.

Gris: I see so many people in governmental agencies who are all hassled and unhappy about it. How do you find this life when you have no real income?

Linda: I really enjoy it. Somebody has to do it, you know, and there aren't that many people who want to get involved in this. They figure there isn't any money coming in, you know, what's the use.

Gris: So, that doesn't really hang you up at all?

Linda: No, not at all. Because, like I said, they supply me with anything that I need. If I need something, I can get it through Operation FIGHT.

Gris: This sounds like the kind of revolution that even the Communists would be scared of! Jim, what about you?

Jim: Well, I became associated with Operation FIGHT much like Linda through the acquaintance of a friend and Dale's open attitude towards anybody who comes by. Basically, he sees opportunity or the ability of an individual to help. He gives that individual the chance to help in some way and in this way, I have done what I can. In the way of transportation, I support myself and am not primarily interested in making a lot of money, so we get along just fine.

Gris: What do you actually do?

Jim: Well, Dawn is making clothes for people and sells them at a very low cost. And I repair cars, or just about anything, paint houses, you know, anything to supply my own needs.

Gris: So you've got skills and you're useful.

Jim: Yes.

Gris: And you find it rewarding personally?

Jim: Oh, for sure! I wouldn't be here otherwise.

Dale: I find that when people learn more about each other they get closer together and you find hidden resources in people. For example: we have an older fellow that came by the school that we thought came by just as an observer and we only found out in the last month or so that he had been a master carpenter. He had had some illness and he wasn't working. He was on social security. Now we can draw on him as a supervisor doing instruction with young people who show some interest in woodworking. He's going to be one of the most valuable assets we've gathered this year. Just from close relationship with people we find those who can live together and get along together. We find their needs are not quite as great as when they're off independently searching for their wants.

Gris: Living together. . . this means the commune? Do you all eat meals together?

Dale: No, no it doesn't really. We found that very, very difficult. There are certain groups that can live together in the same house, under the same roof and share these meals but, by each having an established place we can and we do exchange. If Jim calls sometimes and says, "We're having spaghetti." Well, I'll come over and maybe I'll bring two or three people and we'll do it this way or maybe we in turn will have something and they will come over and add whatever is missing in the meal. We have an awful lot of potluck dinner situations.

Gris: But you don't all just regularly live together and eat together?

Dale: No, we do not. As a matter of fact, sometimes it's two or three days and we don't see each other. But each has assumed some personal responsibility, not any designated responsibility, some personal responsibility for seeing that Operation FIGHT stays alive and that it services the people it is committed to service. And that's anybody in the community who needs help. Even if we are lacking in the physical resources to be of help to them, working that referral wheel, we are constantly in touch with agencies who have sufficient resources to facilitate their needs. Then we act as a bridge. We identify the people, cut through the red tape by setting it up and evaluating it from the first point of contact with our organization so that by the time we reach one of the other agencies we can say to them very clearly and positively that this person qualifies for help, needs it, and we will assist in whatever ways we can if you will provide us with "X" vehicle or service. One of the examples is we use the Salvation Army's truck and we provide it with a driver for somebody else to move some things that are heavy to move. We don't have a truck of our own but we contact Action Line with the Akron Beacon Journal. Action Line in turn will contact someone out of its vast resources that can provide us with a truck if Salvation Army's truck is tied up. Then we get a driver from St. Vincent DePaul or one of our own drivers. We'll contact some of the merchants, whatever merchant that would deal in this area, and maybe borrow a dolly, you know, in order that we might

move a refrigerator.

Gris: How much do the merchants help?

Dale: Well, they help under the threat of, well, maybe "threat" is the wrong word, but out of the community, the togetherness of the community, the merchant feels left out if he's not permitted to help. See, we don't beg him to help, we permit him to get involved in the community that supports him and we make this support obvious by some display, maybe in numbers or maybe by contact, maybe by letter, by putting him on a mailing list that informs him as to what we're doing and how services we have to offer could benefit his business. He's not interested too much in us.

Gris: But he wants business and he gets customers because they're loyal to him if he's loyal to them.

Dale: That's true. And we develop that outside group of people who join him, who support and help him; he in turn can help us. If he has a slow moving item, well, we could move that item perhaps because we're dealing in the areas of need.

Gris: So you can help him out.

Dale: We can help him and he in exchange will help us. And we do this with all of the merchants not just where food is concerned or where merchandise of different kinds is concerned; we do this even where car washing is concerned or maybe window washing. It makes no matter what it is; there are people who supply the materials to get the job done and these are the people we contact.

Gris: So, you get a little bit of money in one way or another selling things, you rent some of the apartments to those who can pay for them and then supply housing to some people who can't pay. . . what if a person goldbricks, wants to take advantage of it but won't do anything?

Dale: Well, we know that they're going to be there. There's no question about it; it's sort of set-up in advance. You know that there are going to be those that are not going to contribute. They're going to be there solely because it's a place where they can come and get free services. They can eat or they can get clothing and a place to stay and they can do this free. But we're aware of it. And what we try to do rather than approach him from a negative point of view is make him a part of the general force. So, when we start a head count, his head is counted. Whether he does anything or not, when we speak in terms of the 3800 or 4200 members in Operation FIGHT, we count him. So, we've stolen his entire person!

Gris: If he steals the food, his person is stolen!

Dale: That's right! That's what it is. So this way we don't have to throw him out because I don't want to go on record as being the one to determine; I don't want to question him; no, I would much rather he get away with it than to refuse him and find he needed.

Gris: Wonderful! I'm all with you. But nevertheless that is one of the basic rules that I've hardly seen anyone practice.

Dale: Well, we have very little choice since we have no funds. We have to deal with what resources we have; there's no pie in the sky. Everyday there's some chores to be done, there's somebody who needs help sufficiently. Among the numbers of people we have, there is always someone who adds either access to or information leading to what is needed or skilled themselves or knowing somebody they can refer us to in that vast contact of all the people in the community. We will put in our newsletter that this exterminator has been beneficial to the community in that he has not charged to do "X" number of houses in this particular area, you see. This exterminator gets his name out, plus, anyone who can afford an exterminator would get the recommendation to this man. He in turn comes out and sprays for roaches and we get rid of the roaches and the rats. . . it's a slow process but it's working on a small scale. But we can get the exterminator out to do the job. The same thing with the Kroger stores or the other stores. We help them in moving certain kinds of things that they ordinarily have to pay to move. We don't charge them to move it but in exchange for it we wait Saturday evenings and get the perishable food that would not last over the weekend. We can take these perfectly fresh and usable perishables and use them in exchange for a little muscle that was going to waste anyway.

Gris: Before you got into this, you had association with the Black Panthers, Black Muslims, and most of them in a sectarian way had been doing some of these things.

Dale: That's true. The Federation, too. I was more closely associated with the Black Nationalists as the ambassador of foreign affairs for the Republic of New Libya which was a Detroit branch of the Federation, the Nationalists. They had proposed Free Schools but they had no design, no pattern; they didn't know how. But they knew that the kind of education that we were receiving generally in public schools was not adequate to our needs, not necessarily the academics, but learning how to get along with people, learning how to accept the society that we live in, and learning how to stand up and oppose things that we found were repressive. Since they had these basic ideas and I shared in them, I think that's why we turned to alternative education. We got a lot of information out of that. Then when we separated from them, it was kind of natural of me to adopt some of the ideas that I had found there that would be acceptable to a group of people who shared, who had some common cause for concern in these areas.

Gris: That background of experience was invaluable.

Dale: It has been. It very definitely has been.

Gris: Do you still have good communication with the Muslims?

Dale: Very, very good. As a matter of fact, if they have a problem that's legal or borderlining legal, they call us. We speak for them as an organization. That's kind of strange because it's an exclusively religious organization. It has no outside affiliation. They don't take readily to themselves those who do not believe in Islam. But we have been as effective as we could be in the community and as objective in our approach to the needs of people and not requiring that dignity-stealing kind of questionnaire filled out before we would render the service. So it is not offensive to be served by us. If they need to put in a window glass, all they have to do is give us the address. We don't necessarily have to have their name to put a window glass in for them. So they can come to us. We have some people who have volunteered them legal services and if they have need in this area, the same situation prevails.

Gris: Does FIGHT have any way of pulling together, say, in terms of social life or in terms of religious emphasis--what kind of cement do you have in terms of brotherhood that helps you live together?

Dale: Well, I guess what we use as cement mainly is. . . the word is warmth, you know, that response, love, if you will, the response to the needs of other people. This is an open unbiased kind of response and I think people reciprocate in kind.

Gris: When it's real love, it doesn't stop at any barriers which are superficial and unreal.

Dale: I think that is the prime projectory that we have to deal with. The fact is that we are open and vulnerable as a result of this openness but very few people take advantage of it. We are there to be used. Now, if I think I'm being taken advantage of in some adverse way, I try to find in it something that maybe I can direct in a way that would be positive and let them continue to use me. It doesn't matter.

Gris: That's jujitsu! Isn't it?

Dale: That it is, sir! But that's the dream. The fear is that being human, I get exasperated, confused, tired, irritated, hostile, because of the ineffectiveness of what we are doing.

Gris: And then that turns everything off.

Dale: That's right. Those are the fears, so I try to stay out of those areas, try not to expect enough to be disappointed. The

more disappointment you experience in these efforts the more ineffective and the easier it is to turn towards some of the jobs that are offered that would pull you out of the rat race.

Gris: You can get all kinds of offers.

Dale: Oh, everywhere I go in protest of a given situation, I'm offered a job. "Well, we could use you. Here we've got a department over here that pays pretty well and a guy like you wouldn't have to go through the examination or pass this kind of study. All you'd have to do is come in and make it known that you would accept this kind of job and it would be made available to you."

Gris: And then the whole thing goes up. But it doesn't because your priorities aren't that way.

Linda: If you take a job like that, you've got to put in so many hours and that takes you away from serving the community because you don't have the time. When you have to put down so many hours every week, you aren't there for the emergencies.

Gris: So many people who are in these social service job classifications at so much per year and all that, they find themselves just so frustrated that they aren't doing the real job. They want to get out of it and the frustration just builds up.

Dale: Well, there's a real live fear there. I don't want to minimize it because there are families to be supported with some continuum, some regularity. . .

Gris: Yes. . .

Dale: You know, it's difficult to explain to a kid why there's no food on the table. You can't tell him, well, I didn't get paid or there's no money or. . . he wouldn't understand it. So we have to be cognizant of the fact that these people have their families and their personal commitments to these families. What I try to do is to stretch that philosophy and that commitment to be sufficiently inclusive of the people.

SHARING RESOURCES

This tale may help those who try to find a way for men to work and not have to beg. I have experience, for I tried to help such in the time of distress before the last war. This was a terrible thing in my country, but I myself had the means to live for I had a farm and men who worked on it to produce food.

Then the food had no value as no one had the money to pay for it, and my men wanted money and I had none to give them, for there could be none if no one bought the food we produced. I hardly knew how to do it, for people kept coming to beg for food, but I needed money to pay my men.

I tried to see how I could meet this emergency, but could see no way, for this was truly a deadlock of world perspicuity, and I was hopeless of solving this huge problem in any complete way, and my heart was heavy at the cloud in the lives of men, and I thought life hard to live. It seemed hard to ask men to starve because there was no money when food was there; so I tried to think if I could at least help a few, and tried giving each the food that could be considered his broad need in life in exchange for his work in helping to produce this food in excess of his own need.

The men agreed to this, but some could not understand why they should be asked to work the extra bit to feed others. I tried to show them they had always done this, but no, they could not see the truth that all must work to help others or the world cannot go on, especially as many cannot work, or have children who need food. They began to see it to some extent, but I had trouble in finding enough work for all for so many had no food so longed to come. More than this, they called their friends who had no food and told them they could work their keep in this way.

I hardly knew how to manage, but I thought each man could make a thing of use to the community that could be exchanged for food others grew. This partly succeeded as some had learned other trades and liked to use their skill, but they did not love to serve. I showed that I helped in exactly the same way, by giving my work to the whole and making something that could be used.

True thought calls to other true thought, and the men began to think of these things too, and many had ideas that were of service.

Then the trouble grew worse, and more came to work for food, but I had no more food to give, but could not turn away hungry men. This made me consider other kinds of food that could be grown; this was not too difficult except that they liked meat best and this they could not have. But I explained this was so, and that they

would only be able to live by growing the best food we could in the conditions we had; they saw this so had to be content. They worked and grew grain and vegetables, but they still preferred meat.

Then I found I did not need meat and worked even harder than those who ate meat; they saw this but it did not please them. They had ideas that I needed no meat because I pretended I had none but had it in secret. I thought I was quite open with them, but they did not believe this could be. Then they discovered that I truly had nothing they did not have; this helped, but not much for I had no meat for them but only grain and vegetables.

Then we tried to agree all together how to live on this piece of land, for there were now many. It was a problem indeed, and they soon saw the only way to live at all was to be content with grain and vegetables; but I did not love to hear them grumble. I loved to think they could be happy to live on their own work on the land.

I had a fresh thought that all could be more free if we had a common feeding hall. They saw this helped to make the food go further, but many did not care for eating there. However, we did this, and the food held out better and we could have more variety as there was more to choose from. It helped to satisfy them, but no one really enjoyed this life till I thought of the little bit of love that made the difference.

This was for each to volunteer if he would help a neighbour's child. This had an immediate effect for the children needed a lot and this need they met in all sorts of ways. It became a true interest to them for all had very little to make things from, but their love for the children helped them to be eager brains to think of things they could make. This made those with children so grateful, for they hardly had a hope left that their children could be cared for, but now they had much to care.

Those who could taught them. This was the best of all for the children loved to learn and wrote on bark of the lovely silver trees, but only with bits of thorn that scratched. This did for books, but the question of being taught to stitch was harder for there was hardly anything to sew. But they tried to make fibres out of the tree branches that were there, retting them by soaking, but not easily or well. It was difficult, but they enjoyed their endeavor; but the children were ill-clad in the cold. But this love was a real provision of help by giving the children the warmest love while they still had to fend for themselves. They could be happy too, as they loved the men who care for them so lovingly.

This thing grew so that when a better time came they did not want to go to other work, except for the need of better homes and clothes. They had learnt to love each other in misfortune.

This is a true tale. I think there are many such for I was not the only one who had a beautiful farm to share.

This account was given to us by an English woman who got it from the American farmer who told the story. She did not have the name of the farmer or his address. So it must remain anonymous.

THE COMMUNITY'S POTENTIAL IN ECONOMIC PIONEERING

By Griscom Morgan

Economics, ethics, religion, education and the other aspects of community are different parts of one seamless fabric of life that are integrally associated with each other. To isolate them out of relationship with each other is to make each facet sterile and to disintegrate society. Our concern in this study of building a better economic order is to see it in this relationship with the whole of society, and yet practically in simple ways that are relevant to effective action and accomplishment in the local community.

Definition of Terms and Concepts

Current thought about social and economic change suffers from inadequate thinking, semantic confusion and ill-informed action, alike among conservatives, liberals and radicals. The word "radical" is variously used to denote what is fundamental and also what is extreme and violent; "conservative" may mean either resistance to change or conserving a valuable heritage. If by revolution we mean profound rather than superficial or violent change, we must recognize that profound change generally grows from unobtrusive and small beginnings which incorporate much from the past heritage. Thus Karl Marx wrote that, "new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence are matured in the womb of the old society."¹

Because of his materialist philosophy, Marx was committed to reducing social forces to material causes, but his recognition of the slow underlying processes of change that presage profound outward modifications of society was clear. Who anticipated the revolution being wrought by the internal combustion engine before it began to displace horses, railroads, and ships with automobiles and aeroplanes? This was not an evolutionary reformation of the horse; yet its use in automobile and aeroplane went through a progressive evolutionary development of its own. Similarly the significance of changes in the basic pattern of society must be judged not by the slowness, suddenness, violence or extremism of their operation but by the profundity and soundness of their implications as they are conceived and as they develop.

Building With the Best From Mankind's Heritage

Without appreciation of the values and accomplishment of existing society, endeavor to make social and economic change tends to become vandalism, the indiscriminate destruction of the precious heritage that makes us human. This is one of the more disastrously violated principles throughout modern society. An example will demonstrate this.

A teacher in the Hopi Indian school was observed by a visitor to give no consideration or reference to the Hopi's own culture or heritage, leading her Hopi students to the conclusion that their own heritage was to be wholly discarded for that of the white man's. On being questioned about this she replied, "But what is there of the Hopi heritage worth preserving?" Those of us who know or value the Hopi heritage can recognize the blindness and harm in such lack of appreciation of a heritage. Yet a comparable failure in appreciation is common among those who would displace the present dominant culture and economy. Economics is so integrally interwoven with all aspects of society that ill-considered and wholesale discard of economic processes can disrupt the whole fabric of sane living.

In concrete terms of our present economy this means that we must not "throw the baby out with the bathwater" in discarding all aspects of the open market economy, of a money exchange system, and of individual economic freedom and initiative when we would eliminate the curses of an economy dominated by individual and corporate self-interest.

Our open market economy has enabled us to have freedoms we little appreciate, freedoms allowing creativity and efficiencies that are separable from the evils that have so greatly discredited it. It has been widely assumed by both radicals and conservatives that the faults of our present economy were inseparable from economic freedom and that the alternative was to have all economic processes managed by remote bureaucracies and authorities armed with computers who would allow little freedom for people to choose what they would do with their lives and resources, what they would eat, where they would live and what work they would do--the present tragic experience of the underprivileged.

Those who are desperate may be led by despair to choose totalitarian planning and control over the economy that will guarantee full employment and a minimum of human dignity. It is our business to seek a better way, keeping and improving on the freedom we have while achieving justice and equity. Such a combination of values requires both a better design and function in the economy and discipline and motivation to make it work.

Alternatives to Extremist Violence and Ineffectual Reformism

There is much disillusionment with procedures for social and economic change because so much has proved futile or harmful. Violence of change tends to bring tyranny, chaos, and destruction. Reformism accepts the basic postulates of an outworn social and economic order, only reforming some of its more gross symptoms. There is a place in history for the broom of drastic change to sweep away the old order, but the broom does not create the new order, and will leave only destruction and poverty if there is not the slow creative evolution of that which is to take the place of

the old--as Marx expressed it, "within the womb of the old society." So we must recognize the different roles in history of explosive rapid and laborious slow change.*

The real and significant social and economic change we want can best be achieved through identifying the specific causes and limitations in the old order and developing new patterns of life and economic relationships, free from those limitations, that we can apply and develop in our own lives which will enable us to start the course of a better society. Success in building a new pattern on a small scale can grow and become infectious, spreading by virtue of its inherent beauty, effectiveness and value. This is the antithesis of both "reformism" and violent extremism, for its character is in the origin of the word "radical", going to the roots of things, while it has no implications of indiscriminating destruction of invaluable aspects of the heritage of the past.

Examples of Success in Alternatives

The most potent and practical means of advance is to change the "game" and consequently the rules of the game by which we live, here and now, and to do it in disciplined and discriminating association with others similarly committed. In the seventeenth century the Society of Friends in this manner developed a new order of society among the common people at a time when the ethics of economic life were very low. Among other things, it undertook to establish as the standard for its membership that they would deal honestly not only within the Society's own membership but also with the public at large. The Society prospered because people preferred to employ and do business with those who could be trusted to serve industriously, creatively and conscientiously. Their standards then tended to displace the older unethical practices.

To make the change accomplished by the Society of Friends required an organized society with a whole perspective of life, a discipline, and an education that would reinforce it. It could not come into being through isolated individual departures or by mere emotional and verbal assent, but required commitment and willingness to pay the price for it among those who joined in this non-violent movement. At a time when many groups were violent and

* Danton, the greatest leader of the French Revolution wrote: "At last I perceive that in revolutions the supreme power rests with the most depraved." Robespierre, the leader of the extremists in the period of terror, wrote: "The misfortune of revolutions is, that we must act too hastily; we have no time to examine. . . and are in a mortal dread that our ideas will miscarry for lack of energy." And so it was also in the Russian revolution. --Quoted in Ca Ira or Danton in the French Revolution by Lawrence Grunland.

conspiratorial in trying to unseat the repressive national government, the Society of Friends was open in its aims and organization and maintained objectives that decent people of all races, classes and political associations could respect and find attractive. The public came to trust and respect these people, even though at one time half of the adult membership were in jail for insisting on meeting in public when such meeting was prohibited; they thereby won civil liberties for themselves and for others.

What the Society of Friends accomplished is paralleled by many other groups and movements for social change, each with its own special emphasis, overall life purpose and economic competence. (One of the most significant is the Ghandian movement in India.) The change accomplished by most of these groups has been limited in conception and benefit because for the most part they did not have a sufficiently broad scope of understanding and they failed to examine some of the underlying assumptions of the prevailing economic order responsible for social injustice, exploitation and degeneration. They had been virtuous parts of a society whose underlying character was faulty. Only the greatest of them had some recognition of this fact and the vigor to break out of the dominant social order.

John Woolman, who more than any other man initiated the anti-slavery movement, saw the equivalent of slavery within the established economic system, and wrote:

"Though the poor occupy estates by a bargain to which they in their poor circumstances agreed, and we ask even less than a punctual fulfilling of their agreement; yet if our views are to live in conformity to customs that have not their foundation in the truth, and our demands are. . . greater. . . than is consistent with pure love, we invade their rights as inhabitants of that world, of which a good and gracious God is proprietor, under whom we are tenants.

Thus oppression in the extreme appears terrible, but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression."

Precision in Definition of Problems and Solutions to Follow

We have said that to achieve a good society free from the faults characteristic of our present social order it is necessary to go deeper than just individual well-doing, and to change the "game" and the rules of the game so that the dynamics of our economic society will not be harmful. We cannot do this if we do not adequately understand these dynamics, the underlying causes of harmful conditions in our economy that so afflict society. Given such understanding we can proceed to make clear a program of action that people can engage in here and now that will make for fundamental correction and betterment of society. We will here briefly define two underlying causes of social injustice and social deterioration that can be corrected by beginning in united action through small pioneering community endeavor.

Characteristic of the existing social order is its tendency to depress income and living conditions of a significant portion of the people, accentuating the division of society into wealthy owners, workers and the poor, and bringing problems of unemployment, depression, perpetual inflation and economic imperialism. Thomas Jefferson observed this taking place in the England of his day,* as we now observe it. Two Englishmen of his time, Robert Owen and Thomas Hodgeskin, pioneered in recognition of this problem (their thinking was the background of Karl Marx's economics); their diagnosis has been confirmed by many economists as in the findings of the Brookings Institute.² This may be summarized as follows.

Unemployment and economic crises occur primarily because the general population does not receive or spend sufficient income to purchase the product of their labor, leaving a surplus in the hands of the owners. The amount of money received from the sale of goods is so much larger than is paid to labor that the difference in profits and interest is then available for savings and investment. But with inadequate market for the surplus of goods already produced, there is inadequate justification for investment in more productive capacity, or to employ all the labor force, so their money savings flow out of circulation. Competition for inadequate markets leads to a dog-eat-dog competitive society. Depression of wages results from the surplus labor force competing to find work. The wealthy class with surplus income seeks to find safe forms of investment with their money and buy up economic resources, leaving the poorer people propertyless, disaffected and alienated.

Lesson From a Historic Era of Economic Well-Being

These harmful economic conditions have not always accompanied free market monetary societies. Some economic historians, both Marxist and non-Marxist, have pointed out that in contrast to the pattern usual in history, during the period in medieval Europe when

* In a letter to Dr. Thomas Cooper of September 10, 1814, Jefferson described the lot of the people of England. After telling of the three categories of the population--the wealthy, the laboring class and the paupers, who, he said, "are about one-fifth of the whole," Jefferson wrote: the first category, "which have the laws and government in their hands, have so managed them as to reduce the third description below the means of supporting life, even by labor, and to force the second, whether employed in agriculture or the arts, to the maximum of labor which the construction of the body can endure, and to the minimum of food. . . which will preserve it in life." The result is, "The pauperism of the lowest class, the abject oppression of the laboring and the luxury, the riot, the domination and the vicious happiness of the (well-to-do). Such is the happiness of scientific England." Jefferson wrote that even the black slaves in the United States "are better fed in these States, warmer clothed, and labor less than the journeymen or day laborers of England. . . "

the guilds were strong there was freedom from economic crises and unemployment.*

The period of several hundred years of unexampled continuous prosperity in medieval Europe occurred not because it was a "pre-capitalist" primitive economic society as Marxist and capitalist economists have assumed, but because the underlying dynamics and cause of the harmful condition of capitalism was temporarily eliminated. Both before and since then the conventional economic order has afflicted mankind and accentuated the downfall of civilizations back through history.

If we could today have the benefit of freedom from the curses of economic crises, inflation, unemployment, community disintegration, and the development of extremes of poverty and wealth and yet maintain a free market economy, we would not need to sacrifice economic and social freedom for inefficient, vastly complex top-down bureaucratic governmental management of economic processes. Such accomplishment is greatly to be desired. But to accomplish it we must have a precise understanding of how it was accomplished during that unique period of European history. We have discussed how this took place in greater detail in our essays The Simplicity of Economic Reality and The Community's Need for an Economy.

Monetary Cause of Medieval Well-Being

The harmful condition of capitalism was eliminated in medieval Europe by an accidental circumstance. Today we assume that the cost of printing and managing our system of coinage and currency should be a governmental expense paid for by general taxes. But during this medieval period of prosperity such costs were paid for

* Brooks Adams wrote of this: "From the middle of the twelfth to the middle of the thirteenth century was an interval of almost unparalleled commercial prosperity." (The Law of Civilization and Decay.) Julian Borchardt, author of the classic The People's Marx, wrote in his essay, The Essence of Marx's Theory of Crisis: "It is a matter of general agreement that the (economic) crisis constitutes a grave disturbance of equilibrium between production and consumption. . . The question rises: was this always the case? or was there a time in which no such disturbance occurred--nay, may even have been impossible. We know nothing of any commercial crises during the Middle Ages, that is to say, of serious ruptures, of the equilibrium between consumption and production. Or, at any rate, we know only of such as had their origin in external causes. . . But we do not read of any which, as is the case today, had their origin in internal causes and derived from 'over-production.'" Included in Capital and Other Writings by Karl Marx, p. 302 Modern Library, N.Y.]932

by a direct tax on periodic and frequent reissue of the currency when exchanging the old for the new. This was an easy and inexpensive system of taxation and it was used to raise much more revenue than necessary to pay the cost of the currency system.

In practical effect this form of taxation made money unhoardable. It made it impossible for people to save money out of circulation, or to exact high interest for lending it. With money no longer hoarded out of circulation, the resulting circulation and supply of money assured an adequate market for goods and labor. At the same time it eliminated the threat of runaway inflation, for runaway inflation is the consequence of people and banks having kept much savings in the form of currency, as those in Europe have stored away so many billions of American dollars.

With the forced use of money as a medium of exchange and not of saving, savings must be invested in real wealth. The necessity to invest forces the reduction of interest rates to the point that all surplus income that people desire to save is forced to be invested at interest rates that are not too great a burden for borrowers to pay. In such ways enough money can be maintained in circulation as to yield full employment, without threat of inflation. This kind of an economy, such as prevailed during the guild and gothic era of Europe, can be practiced by nations, groups and communities of people today.* Successful experience and means for this have been reported in previous Community Comments.

Most socialist governments have been relatively ineffectual in creating a sound economy because with the prevailing inadequate understanding of the cause of failure of the free market economy, they have centered their attention on nationalizing major industries and on building a welfare state by which to palliate the malfunction of the economy, leaving that malfunction uncorrected. Thus

* The theoretical feasibility of such an economy has been carefully examined by Professor Dudley Dillard, head of the Department of Economics at the University of Maryland. He wrote: "It should be observed that there exists, so far as this author is aware, no satisfactory refutation of these proposals." --"The Theory of Monetary Economy", an essay in Post Keynesian Economics, edited by Kurahara, Rutgers University Press, 1951.

In 1940 the Congressional Temporary Economic Committee Investigation of the Concentration of Economic Power issued a study of Recovery Plans made under its direction by a prominent economist, Dr. Arthur Dahlberg. This study, Monograph No. 25, found but one plan sound and feasible for a stable economic future for the nation, the taxation of money. In a later book Money in Motion, Dr. Dahlberg reported the historical application of this principle in medieval Europe. Legislation for such economic policy was introduced in the United States Senate by Senator Bankhead. Senator Bankhead has been quoted as saying that if this legislation had passed he believed it would have headed off and avoided the Second World War.

they dissipated their energies on peripheral and often on unnecessary issues while the key source of private monopoly power and exploitation continued to dominate and harm the economy. Some leading socialists such as John Strachey and Sir Stafford Cripps came to recognize this, conceiving of a taxed money system as a key measure in achieving a healthy economy, but they had little support from other socialists.

New Forms of Land Tenure Also Necessary

The economy of medieval Europe had one serious fault that did much to counterbalance its blessings. This was that while the wealthy could not hoard money out of circulation and make it scarce, they could and did hoard that other basic necessity of life, land. Consequently, it was an era of widespread feudalism, as well as of community owned lands. The concentration of ownership in the hands of people who exploit their ownership of this basic heritage of mankind can in this age be corrected on a beginning sale as it was in medieval Europe by groups and communities. Just as the nation of Israel during the past half century has established and developed a national land trust to hold title and distribute use of land to which it holds title, so can we. We can develop land trusts to acquire land to be used and conserved as seems appropriate to society's and nature's needs.

The Culture of Economic Life

Such means for the improvement of our economic society are needed, but as technologies alone they are not enough, and if achieved they would not assure a good society. More fundamental than these means of improving the economic order within the circumstances of our own lives is the culture of economic life, for that culture can progressively transform any circumstance into a more or less beneficial one. Elsewhere in this issue of Community Comments we print Dale Miller's account of how a society in Akron, Ohio, has worked in terms of a different culture and spirit in creating a new economic base for a new society. We must be precise in determining what aspects of our cultural heritage are at fault, and not be ruthless and indiscriminate in casting aside the existing culture. It is helpful in making this definition to refer to the writing of a great English man of letters who almost a century ago prophetically defined the problem facing us today. He wrote particularly of middle class England, but the same could be said of all classes:

"Our present social organization, however, will and must endure until our middle class is provided with some better ideal of life than it has now. Our present organization has been an appointed stage in our growth; it has been of good use, and has enabled us to do great things. But the use is at an end, and the stage is over. Ask yourselves if you do not sometimes feel in yourselves a sense, that in spite of the strenuous efforts of so many good persons amongst us. . . we seem to be finding ourselves stopped on this line of advance and on that. . . It is that we are trying to live on with a

social organization of which the day is over. Certainly equality will never of itself give us a perfect civilization. But with such inequality as ours, a perfect civilization is impossible.

To that conclusion, facts, and the stream itself of this discourse do seem, I think, to carry us irresistably.

The well-being of the many comes out more and more distinctly, in proportion as time goes on, as the object we must pursue. An individual or a class, concentrating their efforts upon their own well-being exclusively, do but beget troubles both for others and for themselves also. No individual life can be truly prosperous, passed, as Obermann says, in the midst of men who suffer. . . To the noble soul, it cannot be happy; to the ignoble, it cannot be secure. . . our inequality materializes our upper class, vulgarizes our middle class, brutalizes our lower.

And the greater the inequality the more marked is its bad action upon the middle and lower classes. What a strange religion, then, is our religion of inequality!

--Matthew Arnold in his essay Equality

Indeed, our economic problem is fundamentally a religicus one--not in the theological and sectarian sense of the word, but in the universal sense of which Mazzini wrote, "Religious thought is the breath of life of humanity: at once its life and soul, its spirit and its outward sign."

The most important power in history is the human spirit inspired with high purpose, disciplined with experience in collective action in the affairs of life at hand in daily living, and working together with others of common purpose. Historical and economic laws are like the laws of mechanics which the engineer must master in developing the aeroplane or locomotive. It is people who give them life, intelligent direction and force. And that force must be exercised, developed and applied where people are in their daily affairs of life. It is there that the real and fundamental changes in history are accomplished.

References

1. Karl Marx, Capital and Other Writings, p. 8, Edited by Max Eastman, The Modern Library, New York, 1932.
2. The Brookings Institution, Income and Economic Progress, 1935, by Harold Moulton, and other studies by Moulton and others.

REVIEWS

The Liberation of Work, by Folkert Wilken, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 109 pages, \$3.00).

In The Liberation of Work Folkert Wilken offers a series of case studies in business reform, discussing various English and German enterprises that have taken steps towards the ideal of a community of work. Wilken sees a natural pattern of business organization evolution from the pioneering entrepreneurial start, through a stage of social partnership between owners and workers, towards a community of work where the ownership of capital is "neutralized" and held in common trust by all community members.

Work both as individual creative activity and as a group activity is essential in human growth. This attitude towards work tends to develop as a business matures. Attention shifts from a commercial view preoccupied with making money to a social conception of what the business purpose is. As such attitudes grow the autocratic structure of business organization often frustrates this shift, leading to labor conflict, executive neurosis and so on.

Wilken outlines in particular detail the organizations of the John Lewis Partnership and Scott Bader and Co., Ltd. The John Lewis Partnership is a retail enterprise with 16,000 employees in branch department stores throughout England; Scott Bader and Co., Ltd. is a manufacturing concern employing 300. Both businesses are now owned by commonwealth trusts made up of company employees. The trust arrangement was the result of an effort by the entrepreneurs (Scott Bader and John Lewis) to share profits and information about the business and finally share power. With the reform initiative coming from the owners, the process of turning over control required decades of education, motivation and development of concern for values among employees who wanted little responsibility for business operation.

The Liberation of Work is one invaluable guide to business reform.

A WOMEN'S COMMON-OWNERSHIP COMPANY

A "work-in" by a small group of women in England has led to the exciting development of a women's common-ownership company, as reported in the July issue of Ms. magazine. In its "Notes from Abroad", Ms. reports that after a small shoe company in Fakenham, England, had given its 44 women machinists notice of its closure, nine of the women decided they didn't want to abandon their work: "'We had to do something to keep our business alive and our skills

alive.'" Resisting the barricades, the pleas of their union and their boss, they continued to work in the factory. In doing so they were questioning the right of private ownership to have power over their lives. They knew that their actions were illegal, and that technically they were trespassing, but they got strength from each other and continued to work without pay, hoping that eventually another owner would take over the company. Most of the townspeople and many of their friends thought they were crazy and gave them no support, but their husbands and the local newspaper rallied behind them. The police also helped with the night guard duty. After a "London Sunday Times" article appeared, resulting in contributions from different groups of people, the owner of the company finally stopped trying to break the "work-in".

The women whose former jobs had been the manufacture of shoe tops, enjoyed their newly won freedom and began creating many different leather articles from left-over scraps. They sold them at local businesses and used the proceeds to buy new materials. After working four months without pay, Scott Bader Co. Ltd. gave them a low interest loan with no definite repayment date, and a lawyer volunteered his services to help them establish Fakenham Enterprises Limited, their common-ownership company. The women, as equal shareholders, elected a director and two assistants. They hold bi-weekly meetings and make most decisions by consensus. They've travelled a rocky road towards establishing a sound business, but through their united efforts and support of people like Scott Bader Co. Ltd., a sympathetic lawyer and a management expert, they've developed a going concern which has won three contracts for its products. Also, their way of dealing with each other has changed. "'Before we worked-in,'" says Edna Roace, "'we just worked and that was that. Before, if any of the girls had problems we wouldn't have dreamed of helping them out the way we do now.'" The Fakenham women through mutual support, collective action, and "a little help from their friends" affected a change they would never have imagined back when they were workers in the shoe factory.